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ABSTRACT

In a televised performance which far surpassed that of any other witness in the Iran-Contra hearings of 1987, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North came to the attention of Americans as a "national hero." To illustrate how North was able to portray himself as the hero/victim and to explore the ways in which he was able to transform the context of his defense from that of courtroom to that of a stage by invoking and manipulating a culturally based and nationally recognized set of symbol systems, this study analyzes North's July 7, 1987, speech to the select committees of the House and Senate. North's speech accomplished this transformation through its invocation of a code of honor, its use of cultural motifs, and its manipulation of a national ideological heritage. The dynamics of this code of honor and North's ability to portray himself as a victim of the proceedings facilitated the creation of ideal personal and political images. By reframing the hearings to adhere to the norms and symbol systems of a code of honor, North created a high context form of discourse which ultimately changed his surroundings from a court of law to a stage on which a heroic epic was being enacted under the sponsorship of American patriotic idealism. (One appendix reprinting North's opening statement at the hearings and 18 references are attached.) (MS)

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True North:
Cultural Images of an American Hero

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ABSTRACT

In a performance which far surpassed that of any other witness in the Iran-Contra hearings of 1987, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North came to the attention of Americans as a national hero. This study argues that Colonel North's testimony was successful because it embodied the cultural motifs and national ideological heritage which belong to a military code of honor. The dynamics of this code of honor and North's ability to portray himself as a victim of the proceedings facilitated the creation of ideal personal and political images. North's embodiment of these ideal images effectively changed the context of the hearings from a courtroom to a stage as he presented his testimony to the select commitees of Congress and the American public.

Of all the witnesses called before the select commitees of the House and Senate, Colonel Oliver North emerged alone as a "national hero" (New York Times, July 7, 1987 p. A3), "a true patriot" (*Time*, July 20, 1987 p.15), the new "American hero" and a "full fledged American icon" (*Time*, July 20,1987 p. 27). Considering that many members of the media, Congress and the American public expected him to emerge as a repentant soldier or a "loose cannon", how was he capable of eliciting such a reaction *once he started to testify*? How, indeed, was it possible that this country could be so divided between those who considered North to be a hero and those who held equally passionately that he was a "can do zealot" (*Time*, July 13, 1987 p.2), a "Rambo" (*Christian Century*, September 9-16, 1987 p. 753), a "felon" (*Newsweek*, June 15, 1987 p. 28), a "full metal jackoff" (*Film Comment*, October, 1987 p. 16) or a representative of "facism with a human face" (*The Nation*, August 1-8, 1987 p. 245).

As it would be immensely time consuming to address in detail the entirety of North's six day testimony, I have chosen to take his July 7, 1987 speech to the select commitees of the House and Senate (see Appendix), as a representative piece of discourse. I believe it gives an effective summary of North's position on both the hearings and his own behavior. Thus, through a close examination of this single speech text, I will illustrate how North was able to portray himself as the hero/victim. More specifically, I will explore the ways in which he was able to transform the context of his defense from that of courtroom to that of a stage by invoking and manipulating a culturally based and nationally recognized set of symbol systems

Codes of honor, Codes of dignity and Context

My purpose is to demonstrate how North's speech accomplishes this transformation through its invocation of a code of honor, its use of cultural motifs and its manipulation of a national ideological heritage. The Hymesian (1972) framework of ethnographic interpretation, Hall's (1981) concept of

context and Philipsen's (1986) study of Chicago Mayor Daley's council speech are the principal theoretical pieces that guide this inquiry. This approach will facilitate identification of key symbols and symbol linkages which North was successful in utilising. It will also illuminate the way his speech functioned to transform a particular speech event from its traditionally legal inception to its ultimately theatrical conclusion. Through his invocation of a code of honor North is able to create successfully a dramatic context: a context in which his actions inherit new meaning.

It is important at the outset of this venture to define a code of honor as distinct and in many ways opposed to a code of dignity. If we take a code to mean the culturally agreed upon rules by which particular actions and words are given specific meaning within a specific context, then we are further enabled in understanding North's power to alter his situation. A code of honor rests on the individual's reconition of self within the confines of specific societal roles and norms. According to Philipsen:

> ...the person in the code of honor is most fundamentaly a *persona*, the bearer of a social identity, based on gender, age, lineage, residence demeanor, and personal accomplishments...The ideal person in such a world discovers his or her proper place, locates his or her *persona* within it, and acts to reinforce this scheme materially and ceremonially" (pp. 257-258).

The code of dignity, by contrast, looks to an individual sense of identity beyond societal roles, what Berger et al. have described as an "intrinsic humanity" which supercedes positional and norm guided constraints. Thus, while both codes strongly manifest themselves in the relations between the individual and society, while both rest on a strong moral calling, the identification and recognition of self is reversed between the two. In a code of honor the self is recognised and manifested in *being* a particular role. In a code of dignity self-discovery lies in emancipating the individual from the exact roles which an honor laden society embraces.

This distinction between codes of honor and codes of dignity is crucial not only to understanding Oliver North but also to understanding the impact of his testimony on the American Public and various members of the Select Commitees. The highly divergent and highly emotional responses that came forth during and after North's testimony become considerably more understandible once these two codes are situated in the cultural fabric of those who reacted. The people whose sensibilities were absolutely offended by North's deeds and his defense of these deeds spoke eloquently from the cultural texts which have distinguished the the legal and moral tenets of America; namely they spoke of democracy, of a free America built on participatory government, of a government that was purposefully created with three seperate and distinct branches. In the eyes of these people representing a code of dignity, North had an obligation to uphold the integrity of these tenets and the laws which evolved from them. He had an obligation to uphold the laws of this country which protect the rights of *all* individuals over the sometimes needs and policies of those within the upper echelons of the White House.

For the many Americans who cheered heartily as North rallied against the suit-and-tie onslaught of legally situated Senators and Congressmen an equally strong cultural theme rang true. While Americans pride themselves in their individuality they also laud the values of loyalty, courage, power, magnanimity, and piety. Expressions like "For God and Country" contrast with dignity's "liberty and justice for all".

There is an undeniable dualism which characterises the cultural character of the country. The rituals of patriotism often fly in the face of the very values they purport to uphold e.g., manditory pledge of allegience. But this does not prevent the two value systems from coexisting as North's testimony clearly shows.

Not surprisingly these two codes carry with them differing expectations. For those who were offended by North's disregard for the law and the people it represented North's days on the witness stand were anticipated with the eagerness of a puritanical public hanging. For those who had more faith in his bravery and patriotism these same days were seen as an opportunity to defend not only himself but the values of the country. Two vastly differerent situations characterize the enactment of these two sets of expectations. While North's hearing may have begun with a tinge of the tribunal it certainly did not maintain a severe tone of legal austerity. In an amazing display of rhetorical dexterity North situated his defense in terms of a code of honor despite the pointedly legal and dignified nature of the hearings. Not only did North's use of an honor code erase doubts about his character in the eyes of many Americans, it effectively altered the context or situation in which he presented his defense.

The transformation of a situation by a particular text--in this case North's speech--has been termed "contextual reconstruction". Branham and Pearce state that "contextual reconstruction occurs when a text appears in but alters the expectations in which it is understood and evaluated" (1985, p.291). Certainly North was able to alter the expectations of almost all those who witnessed his performance in front of the cameras and the commitees, but the alteration which took place was was not simply a change of image from bad to good, from villain to hero but a shift from the "real" to the "ideal", from the realm of legal facts to the realm of mythic roles. "For all, the qualities enjoined by honor provide the link, not only between self and community, but between self and idealized norms of the community: 'honour considered as the possession by men and women of these qualities is the attempt to relate existence to certain archetypal patterns of behaviour'" (Berger, et al, pp. 86-7).

Herein lies the means by which North is able to bring his audience from the staid oak benches of the courtroom to the plush arena of the theatre. By exploring North's enactment of a specific *persona*, his devotion to words and actions which belong to a code of honor it becomes possible to understand how he was able to effectively change his audience s sense of context. The words of North s speech do not have a traditional place in the courtroom: they make little or no sense in a context of legal self-defense. However, they *do* make sense in the context of a hero s role as idealized in the cannons of American folk culture.

NORTH S SPEECH: A SENSE OF PLACE AND THE DEMANDS OF DUTY

Within North s speech two underlying themes elucidate the code of honor he uses to transform his situation: place and effort. As a marine officer and member of the N.S.C. North s sense of place is defined not by physical boundaries but by boundaries of rank and earned respect. A strong sense of hierarchy is built into his sensibility as a member of the armed forces and the government.

> It is (also) true that concepts of honor have survived into the modern era best in groups retaining a hierarchical view of society...In such groups honor is a direct expression of status, a source of solidarity among social equals and a demarcation line against social inferiors" (Berger et al, p. 86).

Within a social sphere North's sense of place is determined by his responsibility as a father and husband. Effort is in many ways the modern rendition of chivalry. It is the "mad" scramble to carry out duty at almost any cost. It is the superhuman push to accomplish tasks in the name of ideals that are foundation of this country's constitution and Declaration of Independence.

Place In Three Contexts

To better understand Oliver North s speech in the cultural framework of an honor code it is useful to examine these major themes as they are displayed in his discussions of work, family and Congress. In their book The Homeless Mind, Berger, Berger and Kellner describe honor (and chastity) as :

ideological leftovers in the consciousness of obsolete classes, such as military officers and ethnic grandmothers" (p.83). As North is clearly not one of the latter, then we can safely assume that through the military he has appropriated a code of honor. North's life within the armed and governmental services inculcated North with a strong sense of place within the larger context of a governmental organization. In his speech he quite clearly invokes this sense of place or position by repeatedly refering to himself as a "Marine officer", an "NSC staff member" or a lieutenant colonel. North's sense of place is based on a system of earned rank, respect, duty, action and appropriate reward. When talking about president Reagan North states: "President Reagan has made enormous contributions, and he deserves our respect and and admiration." He further described the National Security Council as "the president's Staff". With regard to specific members of the NSC North continually mentions the importance of their place within a organization. "Bud McFarlane is a man who devoted nearly 30 years to public service, in a number of responsible positions. "Admiral Poindexter is a distinguished naval officer who served in a number of important positions of responsibility." "William Casey is a renowned lawyer, a war veteran of heroic proportions, and a former chairman of the S.E.C."

Within this framework the individual is identified with the institution as a whole. "I was simply a staff member with a demonstrated ability to get the job done" says North. He introduces himself, not as Oliver North citizen, but as "Oliver North, lieutenant colonel, Marine Corps." In naming himself this way he is both cueing his positional role as a member of a larger tradition-bound group, and affirming a tone of formality within the setting of the hearing room. In the institutions of which North is a part there is a procedural code for behavior according to place. According to this cultural motif of position, North must abide by a system of codes which require a Marine to be proud of his participation in the service but deferrent to his superiors. This system applaudes the "can-do"

colonel but expects him to wait for orders. Thus, understanding place requires an understanding of the specific codes and expectations of each individual s role as a member of the whole organization.

> As a member of the N.S.C. staff, I knew that I held a position of responsibility, but I know full well what my position was. I did not engage in fantasy that I was the presdent or vice president, or a Cabinet member, or even the director of the National Security Council.
>
> I reported directly to Mr. McFarlane and to Admiral Poindexter. I coordinated directly with others, including Director Casey. I always acted on major matters with specific approval after informing my superiors of the facts as I knew them.

"Responsibility" within this code of honor is not really a matter of being trusted *as an individual* to effectively carry out specific tasks. It is, rather, a matter of earned rank which points to competance *as a group member* and loyalty to those who designate or *order* tasks done in the first place. Tasks are thus critically linked to those *in a position* to order them done and those *in a position* to carry them out the "Marine way" or the "N.S.C." way. North effectively combated the "lose cannon" image by presenting his actions as direct responses to higher authority. Whether or not he made individual judgements or took individual actions he was always careful to couch his descriptions of such actions in terms of the hierachical system in which he worked: he always took care to blanket them under some kind of higher authority.

Effort and Sacrifice In Heroic Action

The second major theme which is expressed in this speech event is a sense of effort. This cultural motif is frequently seen in the American ideals of "Its not whether you win or lose but how you play the game" or "Give it your best shot." The team effort which is stressed in these sayings echoes the sense of "we"-ness that North deftly manipulates in his self portrayals as now victim, now hero. North's efforts to achieve collective or "higher" goals such as "democracy" essentially place him in an honored position which appeals to the

American heroic ideal of personal sacrifice for collective goals. In defense of his efforts North says:

> I have strived to be the best Marine officer that one can be. In combat my goal was always to understand the objective , follow orders. accomplish the mission and to keep alive the men who served under me.
>
> Among the 50.000 or so messages of support that have arrived since I left the N.S.C. are many from those who recount the horrors we lived through and who now relate stories of their families and carrers.
>
> There were problems. I believe that we worked as hard as we could to solve them. and sometimes we succeeded and sometimes we failed. But at least we tried

Working hard and "trying" are also ideals of the American protestant ethic in which:" Not leisure and enjoyment but only activity serves to increase the glory of God" (Christian Directory in Weber, 1958 p.157). North exhibits an enormous amount of effort and diligence in carrying out his duties at the NSC: "There were periods of time that we worked two days in every one. My guess is that the average workday lasted at least fourteen hours. " Thus, effort is a means of attaining respect and to a certain degree immunity from criticism in accord with an American cultural heritage and heroic ideal which frown upon the notion of effort as a means to a personal end.

The Imagery and Idiom of Honor

North's efforts as a soldier are seen both outside the parameters of the written text, within the visual imagery of his decorations, and within the text, as it recounts "the horrors we lived through in Vietnam. The uniform that North chooses to wear to the hearings, (He did not wear a uniform as an N.S.C. staff member), identifies both his personal accomplishments and his collective identity within the armed services. " The true self of the knight is revealed as he rides out to do battle in the full regalia of his role" (Berger et al, p. 90). Within the speech itself North makes personal reference to his past and more

recent contact with the rank and file:

> After Vietnam, I worked with my fellow officers to train good marines to be ready in case we were called upon elsewhere in the world, but at the same time, to hope that we never were.
>
> My Marine Corps career was on track in 1981 when I was detailed to the National Security Council. I was uneasy at the beginning, but I came to believe that it was important work, and as years passed and responsibilities grew, I got further from that which I loved, the Marine Corps and the marines.
>
> One of the few good things that has come from the last seven months of world wide noteriety has been the renewed contact that I've had with some of the finest people in the world--those with whom I served in Vietnam.

North's expressions of diligence and loyalty as a soldier are both an affirmation of his sense of military duty and a very personal expression of values which mark him as an individual. In this way he is able to maintain a careful balance between personal and public identity, loyalty, goals, and roles. The national patriotism and individual heroism which are signified in North's uniform insure that a balance between loyalty and individuality is kept. This visually enforced balance further enables him to portray his dual role as victimised citizen and heroic officer.

In this speech the code of honor has a concise meaning. Its specific relationship to the concept of place is formed through the link of identity or personhood with institutional roles (Berger, *et al* 1973, p.90). The Marine Corps strongly abides by this motif of place--increasing its stringency where officers of North's rank are concerned (Jonz, pp. 68-75). Effort, especially as it relates to diligence, is also a basic tenet of Marine Corps. ideology (Metcalf,1939, p.vi). This edict of effort and its support of the close positonal roles of place, are expressed not only through action, but also through an expression of key words which constitute the "idiom" of honor (Friedrich,1977, p.286). North engages his audience with a fluent use of this idiom, deftly interweaving the motifs of place and effort into a heroic image. The audience's affirmation of this image in turn

aids in a transformation of North's situation.

Transformation of Setting: Honor in Conflicting Roles

The setting and particularly the scene of the hearings are what North most deftly manipulates through his testimony. "In daily life the same persons in the same setting may redefine their interaction as a changed type of scene, say, formal to informal, serious to festive, or the like."(Hymes, 1972 p.60) The significance of the hearing room where North testified stems not only from its historical aura but on the present atmosphere of formality and justice. This is all the more important to note considering that the tone and effect of North's testimony are so incongruous with this setting. The scene which is set here by North is influential in terms of creating a new context for the speech acts which occur in the hearing room. The setting serves as a convenient backdrop for the uniformed lieutenant colonel who marches into its midst while millions of Americans look on. What they see is the skillful enactment of a drama that tells of an individual's heroism and subsequent victimage. They are effectively hindered from seeing the defendent in the courtroom.

There are not suprisingly two key participants or agents present in North's remarks. They represent the attackers and the attacked, the righteous and outnumbered hero and his assailants. They are the committee (and by extension congress) and North himself. These agents take on special symbolic meaning within the setting of the hearing room. North opens his speech by saying: "My best friend is my wife to whom I have been married for 19 years and with whom I have had four wonderful children..." Later in the statement, when referring to his work at the NSC, he says: "My only real regret is that I virtually abandoned my family for work during these years" Lastly, he refers to the hardships of infamy: "I would not be frank with you if I did not admit that the last several months have been very difficult for me and my family." North's declaration of his role as a "family man" may seem out of place in a trial setting.

but by doing this he is not only affirming his wife's physical presence but also her symbolic presence as a reflection of his loyalty as a father and a husband. His goal is to create an image of himself that will win if not the minds, then the hearts of the commitee and the American people.

In his discussion of his positional role North deftly manipulates the symbolic nature of his work while steadily cultivating his character as victim. If he is to appear the hero he must stress his strict adherence to the hierarchical system which he represents and yet if he wishes to state his case as a "fall guy" convincingly he must challenge individuals within that system and present himself as a single agent struggling against the odds. As a member of the NSC, and as a Vietnam veteran, North extends his loyalty and energy to encompass virtually all those people above and under him. He is loyal not only to the individuals but to the edict of place: "As a member of the NSC staff I knew that I held a position of responsibility, but I knew full well *what* my position was (my emphasis). "My authority to act always flowed, I believe, from my superiors. My military training inculcated me --in me a strong belief in the chain of command." What emerges here is a true sense of the meaning force behind place in North's belief system.

The loyalty which is symbolized in North's relationship with his "wife" and "family" is indeed different from the loyalty he expresses for "a great president" (Reagan), "a distinguished naval officer"(Poindexter), and "some of the finest people in the world" (Marines). These latter relationships are formed as part of a rigid hierarchy which is responsible for creating close knit and (I will argue later) high context groups of colleagues, buddies, and friends. In the context of American culture if you are a "good family man" then you should be loyal, protective and loving ("I am angry at what some have attempted to do to me and my family"). In the context of the Marines or the NSC if you are a "good soldier/worker" then you should "follow orders", "accomplish the mission" and

protect, "keep alive" your men and projects.

The other "participant" portrayed in North's speech is a conglomeration of the commitee, the congress and the "media". The ambiguity of this last agent is indicative of North s sentiments toward the actions of all three institutions. The "Congress" is a key symbol of the bureaucratic ineptitude this "can-do" hates so much. "Plain and simple the Congress is to blame because of the fickle, vacilating, unpredictable, on-again-off-again policy toward the democratic resistance..." Congress is also blamed for its coarse treatment of the "Nicaraguan freedom fighters" as if their fate was no more important than "the passage of a budget." The committee is a symbol of North's past and ongoing persecution, but is also more importantly a symbol of injustice rather than justice.

> You make the rulings as to what is proper and what is not proper. You put the testimony which you think is helpful to your goals up before the people and leave others out. It's sort of like a baseball game in which you are both the player and the umpire.

North also admonishes: "One thing is, I think, for certain: that you will not investigate yourselves in this matter." By "yourselves" North is referring to Congress' passage of the Boland Amendment, and so connecting the commitee to Congress as a whole.

Calling Others To Their Duty: The Press, Congress and Democracy

These accusations, as well as North's admonishment of the press, can be better understood when put against the background of the heroic motifs of place and effort. As an indication of his continued faith in place North points to the higher authority of the executive branch of government: "Apparently the president has *chosen* not to assert his prerogatives, and you have been *permitted* to make the rules" (my emphasis). By the standards of place the committee is being allowed to overstep the bounds of its normally accorded authority. There is no question that if this process weren't being carried out for

the benefit of the larger institution ("democracy"), that such a breach of hierarchical structure would not be tolerated. On top of this, North sees the televised airings of the hearings as an embarassment " to our friends and allies, with whom we have worked, many of whom have helped us in various programs." Here is a serious breach of the norm of respect which is inherent in the theme of place. For a member of a larger institution, in this case the U.S. government, it is inappropropriate to air dirty laundry. This is, as North points out, not only a betrayal of loyalty to fellow members of government but also a betrayal of friends and allies who "will be very wary of helping us again"

The Congress in turn is guilty of sloth and indifference, if not infidelity. From the perspective of one who is effort-bound "Congress left soldiers in the field unsupported and vulnerable to their "communist enemies." North still bears resentment against the entitity of "Congress" from his feelings of betrayal during the Vietnam war. In North's mind, as influenced by the ethos of effort, Congress just stopped trying and gave up on the freedom fighters in the same way that it gave up on the South Vietnamese. For North the game was not over and he wanted to "try, try, try again." Congress' lack of effort causes, in North's mind, a deep wound to the pride of this country causing "our adversaries to laugh at us and our friends to recoil in horror." From the perspective of an effort motif and a place motif a lack of exhaustive support is equivilant with self-betrayal. Lastly, the media is also admonished for their lack of respect and patriotism in their willingness to print and broadcast " rumor and speculation and innuendo." Again, we see the apparent betrayal of country and morals as they are defined in the light of a code of honor.

What North has successfully created with his skillful rhetoric is a form of social drama. The context or situation that he has placed himself and his audience in is no longer that of the strictly factual courtroom but the emotionally charged theatre. By calling attention to the Congress', the

commitee's and the media's breach of social conduct according to the code rules of the military. North is pointing to a crisis of higher moral order than the crisis which is his own. What are a few shredded documents when our own Congress shows no interest in the the spread of democratic values abroad? North is attempting to take redressive action which will illuminate the moral crisis he sees evidenced in the occurence of these hearings. For North, unquestioning loyalty to presidential edict and (a compatible interpretation of) the constitution constitute a form of sacred text. According to the drama which North has enacted, the tenets of democracy associated with this sacred text are being violated or, more aptly, distorted in such a way as to question the honor of one who had upheld these tenets of democracy tirelessly.

> I believe that this a strange process that you (the members of the commitee) are putting me and others through...You call before you the officials of the executive branch, you put them under oath for what must be collectively thousands of hours of testimony. You dissect that testimony to find inconsistencies and declare some to be truthful and others to be liars.
>
> It is also difficult to comprehend that my work at the N.S.C., all of which was approved and carried out in the best interests of our country, has led to two massive parallel investigations, staffed by over 200 people. It is mind bogglin to me that one of those investigations is criminal and that some here have attempted to criminalize policy differences between co-equal branches of government and the executive's conduct of foreign affairs.

It is also possible to understand here a broader connection which involves North the "good father" and North the "Lieutenant Colonel". North is upset because the media have not only insulted their country, but also because they have insulted him and his family. If North is to convince his audience that he has truly been victimized despite his extreme effort he must make it appear that it is *others* who are not playing by the rules. The rules here are defined in the cultural codes of place. North's statement tries to show, at a complex series of levels, how Congress, the committee and the media are themselves breaking the rules. The difference between North's misdeeds and those of the larger

institutions is that they are both following a different set of rules; in effect North is beyond those rules which guide and bind his inquisitors. In this next section I will illustrate the different structures of codes of honor and codes of dignity in relation to Hall's concepts of" high" and "low" context. This added definition should further expose the workings of the drama which has thus far unfolded around North's narration.

IMPLICATIONS: HONOR DEMOCRACY AND PATRIOTISM

Paul Friedrich in " Sanity and the Myth of Honor" argues that honor is a part of a larger framework of" propositions about honor and nine honor linked values" (Friedrich, 1977 p.290-3). Of the values which Friedrich describes, four are especially useful in evaluating North's speech: loyalty, magnanimity, "precedence," and courage. North displays his magniminity or "generosity, hospitality, and mercy to suppliants" (p.291) in his relationship to the contras: "... the Nicaraguan freedom fighters are people living, breathing, young men and women who have had to suffer a desperate struggle for liberty" " Armies need food and consistent help. They need a flow of money, of arms, clothing and medical supplies." Friedrich points out that: "Kinship loyalty and magniminity combine when one shows respect and consideration for the loyalties of others." (p.292). From our examination of the theme of place it is clear that North's loyalty is firmly with family, marine buddies, co-workers, and country. As noted this loyalty lies within the framework of defined institutions given to prescribed relationships. "Precedence" is based in a similar kind of geneology which monitors roles and relationships as a means of achieving honor either from above: " a great president," or below: "my eleven year old daughter." These relationships link lastly with courage or"the moral fiber necessary to face other men in the struggle over property, life reputation, and other desireables..." (p.293) In having the courage to stand up for his country in battle, his family in the face of humiliation, and himself in the hearings, North is acting out the true

ideal of the honor guided hero.

As mentioned at the outset the key to this conception of honor is that it is relational, it depends of a co-creation of context in which the audience participates in and recognizes the creation of idealized and archetypal constructs. Here is the crux of North's role as a hero figure who is successfully able to alter the trial setting of the hearings. He is not simply a soldier with a wife and children working for government but the *ideal* soldier, with the *ideal* marriage, working for what is supposed to be the *ideal* form of government. By invoking the honor values discussed above, North enhances this form of mystique around himself. He is able to make his defense and acussations against others all the more powerful by transforming the context of his words in appealing to ideals which are above the court's structure.

This structure is embodied in North's portrayals of Congress, the commitee and the media. In contrast to the heroic image that North paints of himself their evaluation of North is not based on a code of honor but on a code of dignity. As mentioned earlier, a code of dignity is characterized by the values of "individuality, the sacredness of the person against the group, equality of opportunity, shared power, fairness, sense of self-worth, and inalienable rights to well being without the need to ask for it" (Philipsen, 1986 p.257). The commitee expects North to account for his actions as an individual who is constrained only by legal precedent, while he insists on justifying himself on the basis of his role within military, government and family institutions. North's admonishments of his opponents are partly based on a sense of honor which mandates institutional loyalty and patriotism. The opponents are accused of fighting against "the president of the United States, who tried valiantly to recover our [hostage] citizens ..." and of fighting against a common institution of democracy: "...these hearings have caused serious damage to our national interests." While North is masterfully redefining his defense and the context

of the trial on the basis of an honor code, his questioners are following a dialogic structure of questioning which weighs concrete evidence over the affinities of individuals involved.

> The concept of honor implies that identity is essentially, or at least importantly, linked to institutional roles. The modern concept of dignity, by contrast, implies that identity is essentially independent of institutional roles.

The two codes of honor and dignity also form interesting contrast in their adherence to what Edward Hall terms high and low context communication. According to Hall: "A high context communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit transmitted part of the message" (1981, p. 91). This type of message is very much in accord with the code of honor which relies heavily on tacit knowledge gained through institutional membership. " I came to the National Security Council six years ago to work in the Administration of a great president. As a staff member I came to understand his goals and his desires." A low context communication overwhelmingly applies very explicit codes which are interpreted much more literally (Hall, 1981 p.91). As might be guessed, this brand of communication is much more in accord with a code of dignity and in particular matches the context of a hearing: "This morning the panel will resume the questioning of Lieutenant [redacted]rth. May the record indicate..." By its very nature law is bou[redacted]extremely elaborate codes which emphasize detail rather th[redacted]ge.

Different priorities are accorded to each of these forms of communication, much as different priorities are attached to the codes of honor and dignity. The clash of these forces combined explains much of North's defensiveness within his speech. Coming from the very high context and honor-laden institutions of government and military, his role takes on a

different meaning. "Very high context systems, by definition, take much more into account, and this has the effect of putting the accused, the court, the public, and those who are the injured parties on the same side..." (Hall, 1981 p.111). North's acculturation to high context environments makes his place in the hearings a foreign one, both in terms of his attempts to explain his victimage and his presentation of heroic ideals. "It is also difficult to comprehend that my work at the N.S.C., all of which was approved and carried out in the best interests of our country, has led to two massive parallel investigations..." The combination of characteristics which identifies each of these contexts further illucidates the dramatic image of one opposing force against another such that the individual who ought to be held responsible in the court is now the victim of unfortunate circumstance who must heroically prevail on the stage.

Instead of having his accomplishments celebrated under the code of honor, North is faced with the threat of prosecution under the code of dignity. To emerge triumphant North cleverly plays these two codes off of one another. Though cloaked in the code of honor he is not blind to the efficaciousness of using a code of dignity to point out the *commitee's* unfairness ("from where I sit it is not the fairest process"), the loaded odds of the entire group against himself and *their* unfair opportunity to judge without being judged. North's success in persuading the American people of his honor and its place within a dramatic si[redacted]esults from his adept bilingualism in the speech codes of honor and [redacted] reframing the hearings to adhere to the norms, and symbol sy[redacted] code of honor, North creates a high context form of discourse which ultimately changes his surroundings from a court of law to stage on which a heroic epic is being enacted under the sponsorship of American patriotic idealism.

APPENDIX A

The committee allowed Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North to present an opening statement, after a two-day delay, and he set forth his view of his White House service and the Congressional inquiries.

SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUYE, chairman of Senate committee. This morning, the panel will resume the questioning of Lieutenant Colonel North. May the record indicate that on 8:15 A.M. on July 7, 1987, the select committees of the House and Senate received a statement, the opening statement, of Colonel North. This statement, pursuant to the rules, has been examined and determined that there are no inadvertent disclosures of classified material; further, that we are satisfied that the statement does not exceed the bounds set forth by the court in the grant of immunity, and although the statement obviously exceeds 10 minutes, we will not insist upon a summary of it. And if the colonel wishes to present his opening statement at this time, he may do so in total.

COLONEL NORTH. As you all know by now, my name is Oliver North, lieutenant colonel, Marine Corps. My best friend is my wife Betsy, to whom I have been married for 19 years and with whom I have had four wonderful children, aged 18, 16, 11 and 6.

I came to the National Security Council six years ago to work in the Administration of a great President. As a staff member, I came to understand his goals and his desires. I admired his policies, his strength and his ability to bring our country together. I observed the President to be a leader who cared deeply about people and who believed that the interests of our country were advanced by recognizing that ours is a nation at risk in a dangerous world, and acting accordingly. He tried, and in my opinion succeeded, in advancing the cause of world peace by strengthening our country, by acting to restore and sustain democracy throughout the world and by having the courage to take decisive action when needed.

I also believed that we must guard against a rather perverse side of American life, and that is the tendency to launch vicious attacks and criticism against our elected officials. President Reagan has made enormous contributions, and he deserves our respect and admiration.

The President's Staff

The National Security Council is, in essence, the President's staff. It helps to formulate and coordinate national security policy. Some, perhaps on this committee, believe that the N.S.C. was devoid of experienced leadership. I believe that is wrong. While at the N.S.C. I worked most closely with three people — Mr. Robert C. McFarlane, Adm.' John Poindexter and C.I.A. Director William Casey. Bud McFarlane is a man who devoted nearly 30 years of his life to public service, in a number of responsible positions. At the N.S.C. he worked long hours, made great contributions, and I admire him for those efforts.

Admiral Poindexter is a distinguished naval officer who served in a number of important positions of responsibility. He, too, was a tireless worker with a similar record of public service, and I, too, admire him greatly.

William Casey was a renowned lawyer, a war veteran of heroic proportions and a former chairman of the S.E.C. I understand that he was also a close personal friend and adviser to President Reagan.

There is nearly a century of combined public service by these three men.

As a member of the N.S.C. staff, I knew that I held a position of responsibility, but I knew full well what my position was. I did not engage in fantasy that I was the President or Vice President, or a Cabinet member, or even the director of the National Security Council. I was simply a staff member with a demonstrated ability to get the job done. Over time, I was made responsible for managing a number of complex and sensitive covert operations that we have discussed here to date. I reported directly to Mr. McFarlane and to Admiral Poindexter. I coordinated directly with others, including Director Casey.

My authority to act always flowed. I believed, from my superiors. My military training inculcated me — in me a strong belief in the chain of command. Insofar as I can recall, I always acted on major matters with specific approval, after informing my superiors of the facts as I knew them, the risks and the potential benefits. I readily admit that I was action-oriented, that I took pride in the fact that I was counted upon as a man who got the job done. And I don't mean this by way of criticism, but there were occasions when my superiors, confronted with accomplishing goals or difficult tasks, would simply say, "Fix it, Ollie," or "Take care of it."

> The hearings are 'sort of like a baseball game in which you are both the player and the umpire.'

Vietnam and After

Since graduating from the Naval Academy in 1968, I have strived to be the best Marine officer that one can be. In combat my goal was always to understand the objective, follow orders, accomplish the mission and to keep alive the men who served under me. One of the few good things that has come from the last seven months of worldwide notoriety has been the renewed contact that I've had with some of the finest people in the world — those with whom I served in Vietnam. Among the 50,000 or so messages of support that have arrived since I left the N.S.C. are many from those who recount the horrors we lived through and who now relate stories of their families and careers.

After Vietnam, I worked with my fellow officers to train good marines to be ready in case we were called upon elsewhere in the world, but at the same time, to hope that we never were. I honestly believe that any soldier who has ever been to a war truly hopes he will never see one again. My Marine Corps career was on track in 1981 when I was detailed to the National Security Council. I was uneasy at the beginning, but I came to believe that [illegible] important work, and as [illegible] and responsibilities grew, [illegible] further from that which I loved, the Marine Corps and marines.

During [illegible] '85 and '86, there were periods of time when we worked two days in every one. My guess is that the average workday lasted at least 14 hours. To respond to various crises, the need for such was frequent, and we would often go without a night's sleep, hoping to recoup the next night or thereafter. If I had to estimate the number of meetings and discussions and phone calls over that five years, it would surely be in the tens of thousands. My only real regret is that I virtually abandoned my family for work during these years. And that work consisted of, my first few years on the staff, as a project officer for a highly classified and compartmented national security project which is not a part of this inquiry.

I worked hard on the political military strategy for restoring and sustaining democracy in Central America and in particular El Salvador. We sought to achieve the democratic outcome in Nicaragua that this Administration still supports, which involved keeping the contras together in both body and soul. We made efforts to open a new relationship with Iran and recover our hostages. We worked on the development of a concerted policy regarding terrorists and terrorism and a capable — and a capability for dealing in a concerted manner with that threat. We worked on various crises such as T.W.A. 47, the capture of Achille Lauro, the rescue of American students in Grenada and the restoration of democracy on that small island, and the U.S. raid on Libya in response to their terrorist attacks.

And as some may be willing to admit, there were efforts made to work with the Congress on legislative programs. There were many problems. I believe that we worked as hard as we could to solve them, and sometimes we succeeded and sometimes we failed. But at least we tried. And I want to tell you that I for one will never regret having tried.

A Strange Process

I believe that this is a strange process that you are putting me and others through. Apparently the President has chosen not to assert his prerogatives, and you have been permitted to make the rules. You call before you the officials of the executive branch, you put them under oath for what must be collectively thousands of hours of testimony. You dissect that testimony to find inconsistencies and declare some to be truthful and others to be liars.

You make the rulings as to what is proper and what is not proper. You put the testimony which you think is helpful to your goals up before the people and leave others out. It's sort of like a baseball game in which you are both the player and the umpire. It's a game in which you call the balls and strikes and where you determine who is out and who is safe. And in the end you determine the score and declare yourselves the winner. From where I sit, it is not the fairest process.

One thing is, I think, for certain: that you will not investigate yourselves in this matter. There is not much chance that you will conclude at the end of these hearings that the Boland Amendments and the frequent policy changes therefore were unwise, or that your restrictions should not have been imposed on the executive branch. You are not likely to conclude that the Administration acted properly by trying to sustain the freedom fighters in Nicaragua when they were abandoned. And you are not likely to conclude by commending the President of the United States, who tried valiantly to recover our citizens and achieve an opening with strategically vital Iran.

Months of Vilification

I would not be frank with you if I did not admit that the last several months have been very difficult for me and my family. It has been difficult to be on the front pages of every newspaper in the land day after day, to be the lead story on national television day after day, to be photographed thousands of times by bands of photographers, who chase us around since November just because my name arose at the hearings. It is difficult to be caught in the middle of a constitutional struggle between the executive and legislative branches over who will formulate and direct the foreign policy of this nation.

It is difficult to be vilified by people in and out of this body, some who have proclaimed that I am guilty of criminal conduct even before they heard me. Others have said that I would not tell the truth when I came here to testify, and one member asked a person testifying before this body whether he would believe me under oath. I asked when I got here, "If you don't believe me, why call me at all?"

It has been difficult to see questions raised about my character and morality, my honesty, because only partial evidence was provided. And as I indicated yesterday, I think it was insensitive of this committee to place before the cameras my home address, at a time when my family and I are under 24-hour armed guard by over a dozen government agents of the Naval Investigative Service, because of fear the terrorists will seek revenge for my official acts and carry out their announced intentions to kill me.

Congress Is to Blame

It is also difficult to comprehend that my work at the N.S.C., all of which was approved and carried out in the best interests of our country, has led to two massive parallel investigations, staffed by over 200 people. It is mind-boggling to me that one of those investigations is criminal and that some here have attempted to criminalize policy differences between coequal branches of government and the executive's conduct of foreign affairs.

I believe it is inevitable that the Congress will, in the end, blame the executive branch. But I suggest to you that it is the Congress which must accept at least some of the blame in the Nicaraguan freedom-fighters matter.

Plain and simple, the Congress is to blame because of the fickle, vacillating, unpredictable, on-again-off-again policy toward the Nicaraguan democratic resistance, the so-called contras.

I do not believe that the support of the Nicaraguan freedom fighters can be treated as the passage of a budget. I suppose if the budget doesn't get passed on time again this year, there will be, inevitably, another extension of a month or two. But the contras, the Nicaraguan freedom fighters, are people, living, breathing, young men and women who have had to suffer a desperate struggle for liberty, with sporadic and confusing support from the United States of America.

Armies need food and consistent help. They need a flow of money, of arms, clothing and medical supplies. The Congress of the United States allowed the executive to encourage them to do battle and then abandoned them.

The Congress of the United States left soldiers in the field unsupported and vulnerable to their Communist enemies. When the executive branch did everything possible, within the law, to prevent them from being wiped out by Moscow's surrogates in Havana, in Managua, you then had this investigation to blame the problem on the executive branch. It does not make sense to me.

In my opinion, these hearings have caused serious damage to our national interests. Our adversaries laugh at us, and our friends recoil in horror. I suppose it would be one thing if the intelligence committees wanted to hear all of this in private and thereafter passed laws which, in the view of Congress, make for better policies, for better functioning of government, but to hold them publicly, for the whole world to see, strikes me as very harmful.

Not only does it embarrass our friends and allies with whom we have worked, many of whom have helped us in various programs, but it must also make them very wary of helping us again.

I believe that these hearings, perhaps unintentionally so, have revealed matters of great secrecy in the operation of our Government. And sources and methods of intelligence activities have clearly been revealed, to the detriment of our security.

Wild Rumors Abound

As a result of rumor and speculation and innuendo, I have been accused of almost every crime imaginable. Wild rumors have abounded. Some media reports have suggested that I was guilty for — of espionage, for the way I handled U.S. intelligence. Some have said I was guilty of treason and suggested, in front of my 11-year-old daughter, that I should be given the death penalty. Some said I stole $10 million. Some said I was second only in power to the President of the United States. And others that I condoned drug trafficking to generate funds for the contras, or that I personally ordered assassinations, or that I was conducting my own foreign policy. It has even been suggested that I was the personal confidant of the President of the United States.

> 'Congress left soldiers in the field unsupported and vulnerable to their Communist enemies.'

These, and many other stories, are patently untrue.

I don't mind telling you that I am angry at what some have attempted to do to me and my family. I believe that these committee hearings will show that you have struck some blows. But I am going to walk from here with my head high and my shoulders straight because I am proud of what we accomplished. I am proud of the efforts that we made. And I am proud of the fight that we fought. I am proud of serving in the Administration of a great President.

I am not ashamed of anything in my professional or personal conduct. As we go through this process, I ask that you continue to please keep an open mind. Please be open-minded and able to admit that perhaps your preliminary conclusions about me were wrong. And please also do not mistake my attitude for lack of respect. I am in awe of this great institution, just as I am in awe of the Presidency. Both are equal branches of government, with separate areas of responsibility, under the Constitution that I have taken an oath to support and defend. And I have done so, as many of you have.

And although I do not agree with what you are doing, or the way that it is being done, I do understand your interest in obtaining the facts, and I have taken an oath to tell the truth in helping you to do so.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for this opportunity, I would just simply like to thank the tens of thousands of Americans who have communicated their support, encouragement and prayers for me and my family, in this difficult time.

Thank you, sir.

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